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ASIATIC EXOTICISM IN ITALIAN ART OF THE EARLY RENAISSANCE

LEONARDO OLSCHKI

I

THE oriental influence on Italian art of the late Middle Ages and the Renaissance has been frequently discussed during the last decades. It is undeniable that some artists of those times were inspired by ornament and iconography of a more or less definitely oriental origin. There is sufficient evidence of contacts between the East and the West in Italian paintings, both religious and secular.

However numerous examples of this orientalism may appear to be, they are not always genuine. Therefore, the problem will always constitute a border-line case in the history of the Italian art of the Renaissance. This circumstance must be emphasized at the very outset of every investigation directed toward the explanation of this puzzling and striking aspect of a general and deep artistic renewal. Only a prudent examination of facts and problems can prevent the misleading conclusions of those scholars who have attributed to oriental models and motifs a revolutionary virtue and a decisive influence on the artistic feeling, technique, and imagination of some leading masters of this great creative epoch.[1]

In discussing these border-line cases in art and literature there is always danger of considering them from a limited point of view which alters their true proportions. Precisely that fault has led to an overstatement of the oriental influence on the Tuscan painters of the early Renaissance. Yet it would be a mistake to deny this influence or to minimize the interest of the problem. To what extent this artistic orientalism is real or imaginary can be established only after carefully examining its different and characteristic aspects, not by relying on fanciful hypotheses or hasty conclusions concerning the intellectual exchanges or commercial intercourse between the East and the West.

There can be no satisfactory results in this vast field of research so long as the idea of the Orient includes all the peoples and civilizations from the Nile to the China Sea and from the Bosporus to the Gulf of Bengal. The visit of the Greek Emperor and his court to Florence during the Council of 1439 or the participation of Russian prelates and "Ethiopian" envoys in this great ecclesiastical event cannot explain to a critical mind the appearance of some unmistakably Mongolian types in the Italian painting of the Renaissance. The products of oriental craftsmanship which were imported into Italy and imitated there during the Middle Ages and the Renaissance will never explain the realism with which contemporary painters represented exotic countenances, traits, and attitudes. There is an essential difference between these products of the minor arts which can be indefinitely reproduced, copied, varied, and commercialized and the individual artistic creation of an outstanding pictorial genius. Thus the strange and picturesque varieties of human races, including Moors, Negroes, Arabs, Turks, and Tartars, to be found in frescos, paintings, drawings, and sketches of different hands and schools, do not belong to those currents of taste and style which determined at an earlier epoch the vogue of oriental silk garments, Persian textiles, Byzantine mosaics, Sasanid sculptures, and architectural details of Syrian and Egyptian origin.[2]

The main concern in the investigation of this widespread orientalism is thus to distinguish carefully between the independent fields of ornament and decoration on the one hand, and the pictorial arts on the other. The vague conformity of some stylistic aspects of early Sienese paintings to Chinese art of the Yüan epoch (1279–1368) and the few scattered Asiatic types occasionally represented by

1. Especially Gustave Soulier, *Les influences orientales dans la peinture toscane*, Paris, 1924, and I. V. Pouzyna, *La Chine, l'Italie et les débuts de la Renaissance*, Paris, 1935. Both these books as well as the unimportant articles of J. Plenge, "Die China-Rezeption des Trecento . . .," *Forschungen und Fortschritte*, Berlin, 1929, pp. 294–295, and A. Renaudet, "Les influences orientales dans la Divine Comédie . . .," *Revue de synthèse historique*, 1925, Nos. 118–120, leave much to be desired in criticism and reliable information.

2. For this aspect of the problem and reference to bibliography cf. W. F. Volbach, "Oriental Influence in the Animal Sculpture of Campania," ART BULLETIN, XXIV, 1942, pp. 172–180; for examples of orientalism in the Paduan school, cf. R. van Marle, *The Development of the Italian Schools of Painting*, The Hague, 1923–38, V, pp. 132 ff.

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Italian painters cannot be compared to the primordial and uninterrupted flow of cultural and artistic ideas from the Near East into the Mediterranean sphere. In that instance a very old cultural commonwealth linked together the productive centers of a domain extending from Bagdad to Córdoba and corresponding roughly to the ancient world. Some models of Far Eastern craftsmanship may have slipped through indirectly, through Persian and Arabian mediation, and met with success in Italian workshops and studios from Venice to Palermo.

The epoch of the consolidation of the Mongolian Empire, between 1250 and 1368, was especially favorable to the distribution of East Asiatic products along the intercontinental trade routes connecting China with the Black Sea and the Mediterranean. This episode in the history of civilization and commerce has been so frequently and masterfully described that it is not necessary to insist upon it here.[3] There is no doubt that the discovery of Central and Eastern Asia by the Franciscan missionaries and Marco Polo's description of the whole continent brought the Far East into fashion and struck the imagination of European potentates and common people alike.[4] It stimulated, too, the spirit of enterprise in tradesmen and artisans. To some extent even creative artists were affected by this interest in the newly discovered continent, but their reaction was isolated, and determined by individual artistic intentions rather than by a curiosity for exotic aspects of life and nature. This fact is confirmed by the development of the contemporary literature inspired by travel.

Both fantastic and realistic ideas about the newly explored East followed the trends and styles of the first travel accounts. The two oldest descriptions of Inner Asia by the Franciscan missionaries, the *Historia Mongalorum* of John of Pian del Càrpine (1247) and William of Rubruck's *Itinerarium* (1255), are straightforward reports of facts and impressions with little margin left for picturesque imagery.[5] Marco Polo's book (1298) keeps the balance between the fanciful pictures of a story teller and the positive interests of a business man. Curiously enough, fantastic descriptions of the Asiatic countries and peoples spread, as European travellers became better acquainted with the whole continent. The extensive description of the Far East written in 1330 by Odoric of Pordenone after a three years' stay in Peking, already shows a marked inclination toward tales of wonders and absurdities.[6] The fabulous element becomes preponderant in Jordan de Sévérac's *Mirabilia* (1329[?])[7] and it is the chief characteristic of Mandeville's famous forgery (1371) which kept alive for centuries the distorted popular image of the Far East, earlier created by credulity, ignorance, and intentional mystification.[8]

The most popular volume of fictional geography was written in Florence about 1400 by Andrea da Barberino and reprinted in innumerable editions under the title of *Guerin Meschino*.[9] In the form and style of a romance of chivalry the book contains a fantastic and confused description of the countries and wonders of Tartary, India, and other regions of Asia and Africa which was echoed in similar narratives inserted into Italian chronicles of the Quattrocento and inspired the most successful popular poems devoted to the marvels of the East.[10] Even after the fall of the Mongolian Empire in 1368 and the extension of the trading monopoly of the Arabs on all the sea routes to India and beyond, no direct contact, no authentic information could correct those fanciful ideas of the Orient. The Latin translation of Ptolemy's *Geography* (1408) and the consequent version in Italian verse by Berlinghieri (1482) did not affect the traditional conceptions which had influenced the most learned of Florentine cosmographers, Paolo Toscanelli, in shaping the image of the earth accepted by Christopher Columbus.

The inspiration of the contemporary Florentine artists appears to be as independent of these learned works of geography as it had already been of the accounts of missionaries and merchants. Contrary, then, to general belief, the evolution of mediaeval travel literature from reliable reports to wonder tales shows that the descriptions of Asiatic peoples and countries are of little use in explaining the striking exoticism in the contemporary art. A typical example will illustrate the independent attitude of the Renaissance artist. Leonardo da Vinci drew from life the portraits of three of those Armenians who were a common sight in the Venice of his time, just as they are in our own (Fig. 1). These expressive oriental types are delineated with the exactness and penetrating realism characteristic of Leonardo's anatomical and scientific sketches. But in describing their country and "the mountains over the Caspian Sea" he invents a sequence of fantastic letters directed to a mysterious "Devadtâr of Syria" and follows the vague

3. There is a short bibliography on these intercontinental commercial relations in the author's little book on *Marco Polo's Precursors*, Baltimore, 1943, p. 3, note 5. The best Chinese source is the book of *Chau Ju-Kua*, translated and annotated by F. Hirth and W. W. Rockhill, St. Petersburg, 1912.

4. Cf. the author's article on "Dante e l'Oriente," *Giornale Dantesco*, XXXIX (N.S. IX), 1938, pp. 65–90.

5. Last and best edition of these reports in *Sinica Franciscana: Itinera et Relationes . . .*, ed. P. A. van den Wyngaert (2 vols.), Quaracchi, 1929–1938.

6. Text in *Sinica Franciscana*, I, pp. 412–495.

7. Edited by H. Cordier, Paris, 1926.

8. On Mandeville cf. Ch. R. Beazley, *The Dawn of Modern Geography*, London, 1897–1906, III, pp. 319–322.

9. No satisfactory monograph has been published about this extremely successful book, printed as early as 1473 as a fictional "description of the provinces of the whole earth and the variety of men, peoples and their customs." Cf. R. Peters, *Ueber die Geographie im 'Guerino Meschino,'* Halle, 1908.

10. Cf. the author's essay on "I cantàri dell'India di Giuliano Dati," *La bibliofilia*, XL, 1938, pp. 289–316.

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exotic geography of poetry and romance.[11] Leonardo's biographers who have taken those sketches and those elaborate letters as evidence of his travels in the East know little about an artist's whims, and even less about contemporary geographic conceptions.[12] While Leonardo's portraits of those familiar oriental men are strikingly realistic, the literary fragments devoted to geographic aspects of the Near East are shadowy, confused, and incorrect. Both these expressions of his tense and inquisitive mind reveal the casual and fleeting character of his pictorial and literary orientalism.

II

The foregoing remarks prove that the question of Asiatic exoticism in the art of the Renaissance cannot be solved merely by collecting and connecting facts and documents. Although a secondary aspect of art and a marginal problem of history, that exoticism touches the very essence, spirit, and inspiration of the arts of the Renaissance. The instance of Leonardo is typical and instructive. His account of the Taurus and Caucasus is nebulous, fantastic, and interspersed with lyrical accents and mysterious suggestions. Some graphic details about the natural aspects and the climate of that distant region lend body to the literary incarnation of a vision which rose from nostalgic longing for unusual, exotic scenery. There is no reason for interpreting the vague geographic reminiscences in such passages as evidence of da Vinci's actual knowledge of the lands described.

In the same way the painters who inserted exotic elements into their representations of a sacred event or a profane scene were merely achieving a pictorial realization of an artistic vision. The realistic quality of those unusual details increased the illusionistic power of the whole composition. Such biblical subjects as the Adoration of the Magi offered opportunity for the display of elaborate pageantry impressively interspersed with realistic elements of more or less genuine oriental origin. This is one of many practices of Italian, and especially Florentine, Renaissance painters which reveal their design to create conviction by inserting into an imaginary scene types and objects known from experience.

Conversely, the intention is also evident of detaching the representation of a religious scene from its familiar or traditional environment or from objective reality by including some unusual object of an exotic character real or pretended. This spiritual exoticism has been recognized as a characteristic trait of early Sienese painting. The early painters of Siena are believed to have been the first to use this unobtrusive but effective artifice which gave their images and compositions a supernatural, immaterial quality. Both tendencies of this artistic exoticism — the illusionistic and the unrealistic — presuppose direct observation of unusual objects, but no conclusive argument ever confirmed the assumption that the initiators of the new style of painting we call primitive or early Renaissance — initiators like Giotto in Florence and Duccio in Siena — abandoned the old Byzantine tradition in order to imitate Chinese models. Critics and historians who have held that opinion are not always aware of the essential difference between a creative and an imitative art. Without venturing into the labyrinths of aesthetic discussion it may be taken for granted that the aforementioned painters and their contemporary admirers would never have been able to understand or to accept those oriental models if they had not been prepared by experience to appreciate the exotic and the unfamiliar. Considerations of this kind will prevent false conclusions drawn from superficial and merely formal coincidences, as well as from casual details.

The affinities between Sienese and Chinese art, first discovered by Bernhard Berenson, are essentially of the kind already suggested.[13] The great connoisseur of Tuscan painting of the Renaissance did not, however, insist on the comparison and thereby proved to be as wise as he was learned. To a scholar familiar with the culture and history of that period it is inconceivable, for example, that an early Italian Renaissance image of the Virgin Mother surrounded by a wreath of angels could be the imitation of a statue of Buddha or the feminine hypostasis of the Bodhisattva Avalokiteśvara frequently represented since the twelfth century in Eastern Asiatic art under the Chinese name of Kuan-yin.[14] The use by Italian craftsmen and artists of some ornamental or decorative patterns of Far Eastern origin can, and must, be admitted without hesitation,[15] but it is impossible to believe that a pagan idol could have inspired a painter moved by the deep sense of Christian worship which is expressed in works of this epoch and kind. The possibility that an oriental painting could have reached Dante's Florence or Siena in the time of St. Catherine, is limited by the indisputable fact that no missionary or merchant would have carried home an object of pagan devotion or even

11. The whole passage is in J. P. Richter, *The Literary Works of Leonardo da Vinci*, 2d ed., London, 1939, II, pp. 317–323. On Leonardo's sources cf. Mr. Freshfield's remarks in the *Proceedings of the R. Geographical Society*, 1884, pp. 323–324. In describing the Taurus Mountains in Asia Minor, Leonardo affirms "that mountain is said to be the ridge of Mount Caucasus," a name used in mediaeval geography also for the designation of the Hindu-Kush and the Himalaya. Cf. G. Boffito, "Gli Armeni a Firenze," *La bibliofilia*, 1937, fasc. 7–8.

12. A critical investigation of Leonardo's geographical notes is still lacking.

13. B. Berenson, "A Sienese Painter of the Franciscan Legend," *Burlington Magazine*, III, 1903, pp. 3–35 and 171–184, especially pp. 8–13.

14. Cf. Melanie Stiassny, "Einiges zur Buddhistischen Madonna," *Jahrbuch für asiatische Kunst*, I, 1924, pp. 112 ff.

15. Cf. O. von Falke, *Kunstgeschichte der Seidenweberei*, Berlin, 1921.

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have wanted to do so. When John of Pian del Càrpine, or William of Rubruck, Marco Polo, or the travellers of the fourteenth century speak about oriental religions they show little understanding of their spiritual and moral content and much horror and revulsion from their practices and forms of worship.[16] This aversion is especially intense when the rites of the "idolaters" show some affinity with those of the Christians. William of Rubruck, it is true, compared a winged statue of Buddha, which he saw in a Lamaist temple at Karakorum, to an image of St. Michael, and observed that other statues hold the fingers in a blessing attitude like Catholic bishops,[17] but he contemptuously designated as "stultitias eorum" all aspects of those oriental religions,[18] and John of Pian del Càrpine believed that the devil spoke through the mouths of their idols.[19]

It would be an error to suppose that Marco Polo, as a layman and a Tartar functionary, would have been more tolerant toward East Asiatic religious ideas and institutions. He speaks with respect of Buddha, but in treating the idols of the Buddhist temples of China, of lamaseries and places of public worship, he uses even stronger and harsher expressions of reproof and hatred than the missionary friars. Finally he even renounces detailed discussion of this "devil's work . . . because it would be too evil and abominable a thing to tell such things for Christians to hear."[20] This consistently hostile attitude prevented any serious interest of the Western world in oriental works of art of a religious character. There is no possibility whatever that any of them were imported and admired even at the time when intercontinental trade was at its height. No direct influence on Italian art through such a channel can be seriously assumed. When a Sienese Madonna of the fourteenth century shows hands and fingers unusually long and diaphanous it is preferable to consider this detail as a characteristic aspect of a spiritualizing Gothic style of painting, intended to give the human body a weightless, incorporeal, unworldly air. It is a mere illusion to discover in the religious art of the Trecento structural and ideological reflections of Buddhist art of China, and it is an historical heresy to say that Sassetta's famous *Apotheosis of St. Francis* "comes as near the Buddhist ideal as the art of Siena ever reached."[21] Interpretations of this kind are merely documents of the fallacy of vision caused by the eclectic artistic culture characteristic of our time. Nothing is gained in the correct appreciation of artistic achievements and stylistic peculiarities by comparisons which neglect essential differences of spiritual background and the decisive influence of deeply rooted feelings and opinions. The only thing that can be said is that there are some transcendental affinities between different artistic expressions of ecstatic religious feeling, even when mutual influences must be excluded for intrinsic and historical reasons. But even in this field the differences between the East and the West are irreconcilable.

16. On the attitude of the mediaeval travellers toward oriental religions cf. the author's *Storia letteraria delle scoperte geografiche*, Florence, 1937, pp. 165–193.

17. *Sinica Franciscana*, I, pp. 227–228.

18. *Ibid.*

19. *Ibid.*, p. 41.

20. *Description of the World*, ed. A. C. Moule and P. Pelliot, London, 1938, I, p. 161. Odoric of Pordenone used a similar expression on the same subject about thirty years later. Cf. *Sinica Franciscana*, I, p. 441.

21. G. H. Edgell, *A History of Sienese Painting*, New York, 1932, p. 193.

III

The situation is altogether different in the secular sphere of life and in the realistic aspects of art. Considered from this angle, Asiatic exoticism shrinks to a few examples which reveal a definite familiarity on the part of contemporary Italian society with characteristic traits and habits of the Inner-Asiatic peoples. The principal marks of this direct experience of men and manners of the Far East are found in physiognomies of a definitely ethnographical character and in costumes and fashions of unmistakable oriental origin. In both cases a careful distinction must be made between the actual reproduction of genuine Asiatic types and the fanciful representations of a conventional and decorative style. Those dignified old men, who appear in many Italian paintings from Giotto to Paolo Veronese, dressed in flowing gowns, wearing long, wavy, curly beards and colorful turbans on their heads are imaginary types. The miniaturist who illustrated the beautiful manuscript of Boccaccio's *Filocolo* in Cassel (Fig. 2),[22] or the French "enlumineurs" of the stories of Alexander the Great, developed this fantastic exoticism into a pleasant mummery of the most varied kinds.[23] Their scrolls and fanciful dress form a sharp contrast to the objective reproduction of genuine details and the authentic portraits which occur in contemporary compositions of a higher artistic level.

The most common ethnic mark found in these works of Tuscan art are the slit eyes which appear at almost the same time in the faces painted by Giotto and Duccio. Their Christs, Virgins, and Saints with slit eyes are not identical with Byzantine types and it would be blasphemous to admit a direct imitation of Chinese models, whether sacred or profane. However tortuous the path of the arts may be, it is not easy to understand why those vigorously creative artists should have picked up this single trait of oriental models, while they were striving otherwise to bring the representation of the human body as close as possible to natural reality and at the same time to ideal spiritual perfection. Rather

22. Of this interesting manuscript there is only a very insufficient description by W. Hopf, *Die Landesbibliothek Kassel*, Marburg, 1930, II, pp. 110–116.

23. Cf. the author's book on *Manuscrits français à peintures des bibliothèques d'Allemagne*, Geneva, 1932, pp. 30, 37, 53, etc.

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FIG. 1. Turin, Royal Library: Drawing by Leonardo da Vinci, Heads of Orientals

FIG. 2. Cassel, Landesbibl.: 2° Ms. poet. 3, Boccaccio's *Filocolo*, Fol. 148r.

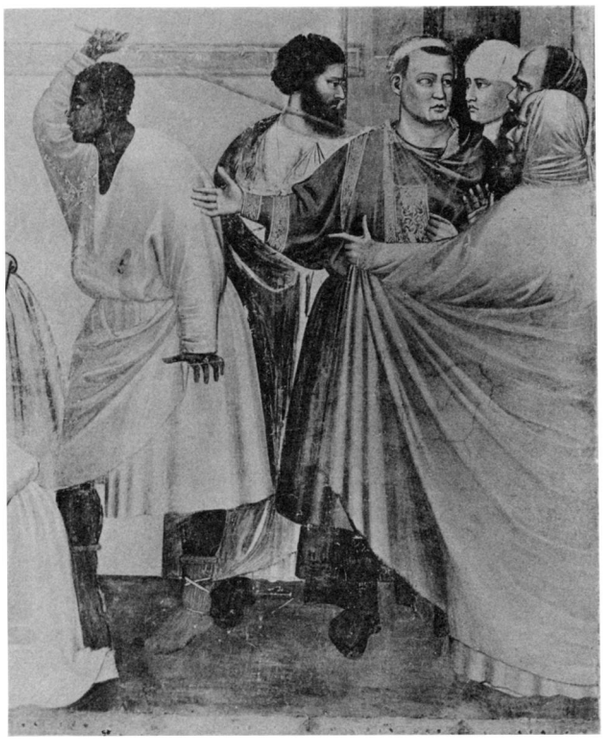

FIG. 3. Padua, Arena Chapel: Giotto, Scourging of Christ, Detail

FIG. 4. Paris, Louvre: Drawing by Pisanello, Asiatic Type

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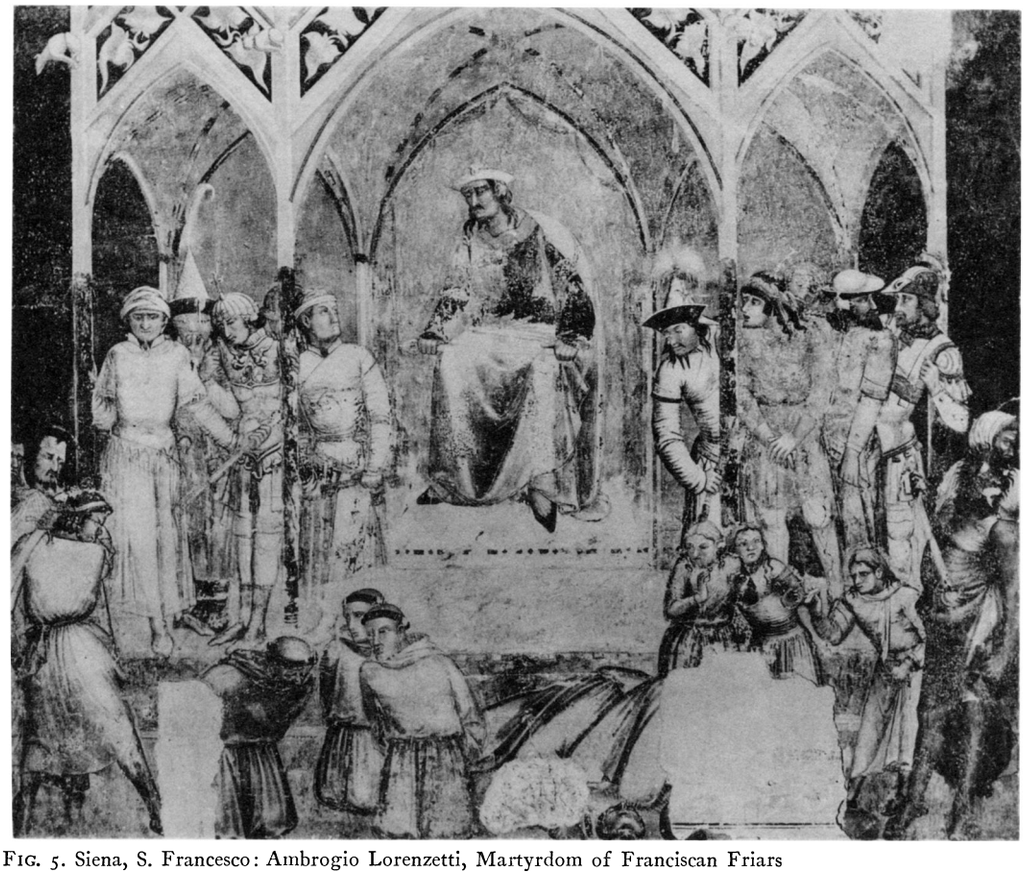

FIG. 5. Siena, S. Francesco: Ambrogio Lorenzetti, Martyrdom of Franciscan Friars

FIG. 6. Florence, Palazzo Riccardi: Gozzoli, Procession of Magi, Detail

FIG. 7. Detail of Figure 5

FIG. 8. Florence, S. Maria Novella: Andrea da Firenze, *Ecclesia Militans*, Oriental Types

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than a racial mark, those eyes, so distinctive in early Tuscan religious painting, seem to be an artifice designed to accomplish the transfiguration of human features by the stylization of the most expressive details. This is, of course, an internal, merely artistic interpretation of a striking stylistic element, but better than far-fetched assumptions and technical explanations, it comes close to explaining the very essence of an art in which the trend toward spiritualization always interferes with the painter's lively interest in the corporeal aspects of reality. The apparent exoticism of those strange eyes is really only an evasion of naturalism. The idea of a Chinese influence can be abandoned without any loss to our historical and artistic understanding of this new style of painting. Even if an Asiatic infiltration into Western Europe were admitted, it is hardly conceivable that it could have interfered with the artistic vision inspired by faith, contemplation and firm traditional requirements. The religious art of the early Tuscan Renaissance aspires to a vivid pictorial embodiment of human spiritual perfection but not to a realistic reproduction of physiognomical or ethnic details.

Fidelity to nature in rendering even the exceptional aspects of the world is a characteristic trait of illustrative and narrative art which does not seek to depict the direct manifestation of divinity in human features but to give convincing substance to the biblical, historical, and hagiographical examples of human devotion, worship, and sacrifice. This kind of painting had been inaugurated by Giotto at the turn of the century with a resolute and original effort toward scenic, dramatic, and emotional reproduction of famous events in biblical and ecclesiastical history. Together with the brisk and eloquent gesture, the spatial dimensions, and the intimate liveliness of his figures he inaugurated "couleur locale" as a new element of pictorial realism. In representing Herod's Feast, the Scourging of Christ (Fig. 3) or St. Francis before the Sultan both the historical and ethnic environments are carefully considered in countenances, costumes, and details. For the first time a clear physiognomical and ornamental differentiation is made between the Saracens and the Romans who usually in the illuminated manuscripts of historical or poetical texts throughout the fourteenth century are represented in the same attire.[24]

In Giotto's frescos the athletic Berber, the Nubian Moor, and the Roman soldier reveal the effort toward an ethnic individualization stressed by characteristic attire and pertinent attitudes. In all these cases the representatives of historically and geographically distant countries no longer appear as monsters, masks, or puppets, but as human beings, sometimes of authentic portraiture. Apart from their garments and ornaments, all the orientals to be found in Giotto's frescos could have been picked up in any Italian seaport, particularly in Naples or Venice where they were an ordinary sight. They do not represent oriental exoticism in a strict sense. Those figures did not evoke the mystery of distant lands or the secret horror of the unknown. They were familiar types of the Mediterranean commonwealth of peoples.

The historical painting thus initiated by Giotto with a stroke of genius and a superlative technical skill, brought the whole world into the graphic arts and opened an immense field for portraiture and imaginative activity. The temperament of the artists, and not the local traditions and schools of painting, determined the acceptance or rejection of Giotto's daring and successful attempt to bring his art nearer to life, history, and nature. Indeed, it is in Siena, the town of gold grounds and ecstatic Madonnas, that he found his most direct emulator in the combining of a religious event with an animated display of authentic and colorful orientalism. The martyrdom of some Franciscan friars (Fig. 5) gave the Sienese Ambrogio Lorenzetti play for his dynamic talent for lively, striking, and impressive scenes of a realistic and picturesque character. Thirty years after Giotto's activity in Padua and Florence, Ambrogio decorated the Church of St. Francis in Siena with a representation of one of the most stirring events in the history of the Seraphic Order. The fresco, which is generally known as *The Martyrdom of the Franciscans in Ceuta* (Morocco), represents the torturing and beheading of friars in 1227.[25] Recently the scene has been connected with the execution of missionaries of the same order in Tana, on the Western coast of India, where the friars were forced to land, in 1321, on their way to China.[26] If that is so, the fresco would refer to a contemporary event in which a monk from Siena is said to have taken part and gained eternal bliss.[27]

In no way do the details of the painted scene correspond

24. In the Ms. III of the Biblioteca Marciana in Venice (cf. D. Ciàmpoli, *I codici francesi della Biblioteca nazionale di S. Marco*, Venice, 1893), Julius Caesar is represented by an Italian miniaturist of the fourteenth century in the attire and attitude of a Saracen sovereign. Iconography of this kind is influenced by the popular French poetry of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries which identified antique paganism with the religion of Mohammed.

25. For the event as narrated by Franciscan sources cf. Wadding's *Annales Minorum* . . ., 3d ed., Quaracchi, 1931, II, pp. 29–34.

26. Edgell, *Sienese Painting*, pp. 128–130.

27. For historical and legendary details cf. Wadding, *op. cit.*, VI, pp. 399–407; *Sinica Franciscana*, I, pp. 424–439, and G. Golubovich, *Biblioteca bio-bibliografica della terrasanta e dell'oriente francescano*, Quaracchi, 1906–1927, III, pp. 211–213. In both cases and in all the sources the martyrdom of the Franciscan friars is described as a consequence of their provocative and even insulting attitude which was hardly justified by the circumstances and the character of the missions. Therefore the authenticity of the reports is questionable. As to Peter de Senis, who would explain Lorenzetti's fresco, he is said to have been a "clericus sine ordine sacro," not a Franciscan monk (*Sinica Franciscana*, I, p. 425, note 4), while the inscription, "*Protege, Petre*, etc.," did not belong to this fresco. Cf. G. Sinibaldi, *I Lorenzetti*, Siena, 1933, p. 213.

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with the data of the Franciscan martyrology. The vague geographical knowledge predominating among laymen and the similarity of events narrated in contemporary sources caused the painter to conceive the scene in a general sense rather than indulge in realistic coloring of a specific exotic environment. In both cases Franciscan friars had been victims of Mohammedan fanaticism. To Ambrogio Lorenzetti, who never left his own country, it made little difference whether the event depicted took place in a seaport of Morocco or on a small island off the Indian coast. His painting is the realization of a pictorial orientalism the elements of which no longer retrace typical aspects of the Mediterranean variety of races but display a startling exoticism of an unmistakably Asiatic character. Among the personages represented in the scene there are no Moors, Saracens, or Berbers, but — aside from sundry rather familiar or conventional figures and apart from a few fancy dresses — it is easy to recognize in the faces and attitudes Mongolian, Sarmatic, and Central Asiatic types never heretofore found in the figure arts of Western Europe (Fig. 7). Evidently in this case a new and strange Asiatic exoticism took the place of the familiar Mediterranean orientalism developed by Giotto a generation before.

This circumstance has always aroused much speculation. A mass of heterogeneous material has been collected in order to connect these exotic appearances on a cloister wall of Siena with the missions "ad Tartaros," Marco Polo, the Christian diaspora of the Far East, and with the Tartar embassies to the Popes and other more or less secret ties linking the Western to the Asiatic world. The impression has been given that Tuscany was almost a neighboring country of the great Mongolian Empire and that Mandarins, Khans, and oriental dignitaries were almost as much at home in Florence and Siena as in Peking, Tabriz, and Calicut. It is through these exaggerations and a corresponding lack of criticism and discernment that a few allusions to distant or fabulous countries in popular poems of the Quattrocento, drawn from antique texts and from reminiscences, have been interpreted as documents of an alleged "fureur asiatique" burning in the brains of the hard working and very positive Tuscan people.[28] This is mere hallucination. Nor can Lorenzetti's fresco be interpreted as proof that "about this time the arts and crafts of the contemporary orient were beginning to invade Italy."[29] In reality the whole of Trecento painting can show only one other example of an unquestionable, but problematic, Asiatic exoticism.

A little group painted shortly after 1350 by Andrea da Firenze, in the foreground of his fresco in the Spanish Chapel of S. Maria Novella in Florence (Fig. 8), has always attracted the attention of lovers of Tuscan art.[30] There a Florentine dandy of that time and his companion are represented talking with two dignified men whose countenances, costumes, and attitudes hint at Central or Eastern Asia. The conventional traits of two old, bearded orientals sitting to the right of the group throw into relief the realistic rendering of the two strange personages. Their appearance in this teeming representation of the *Ecclesia Militans* is explained by Andrea's intention to give a vivid image of the people, the historical figures, and the habits and dress of his time and country. Lorenzetti did the same without any oriental touch in his famous Allegories of Good and Bad Government in the townhall of Siena.

In the Spanish Chapel the exotic guests evidently emphasize the universal rule of the Church and the conquests of the Dominican Order which are glorified in this spectacular decoration. In addition to being a pair of striking portraits the two orientals are a symbol of the recent expansion of the Church and the Order in the East through the missions "ad Tartaros." Their ethnic traits do not permit identification of their country of origin, but there can be no question that the two men are Catholics dressed up as more or less authentic orientals. No heathen or Saracen, no Nestorian or Greek could have been represented in this form in a fresco dedicated to the triumph of the Catholic Church. By this token their exoticism is ecclesiastical and picturesque rather than racial or esoteric. Since Andrea painted in this fresco the idealized portraits of Boccaccio, Petrarch, and other famous men of his century,[31] it can be supposed that he wanted to represent in that oriental attire Marco Polo and his father, both described in the former's book as champions of the Christian faith and papal envoys to the Tartar court. Andrea painted his fresco about thirty years after Marco's death (1324), but the great traveller was not forgotten. It is, in fact, alleged that for a long time there was always in the Venetian masques one individual who assumed the character of "Marco Milioni," as he was familiarly called in his native town.[32] The early translation of his book into the pure Tuscan dialect of the Trecento and Giovanni Villani's mention of him in his

28. Soulier, *Influences orientales*, p. 321. The allusions contained in those poems refer to Lybian snakes, Indian elephants, Scythian hunters, and the perfumes of Saba, Arabia, and India, i.e., to the commonplaces of a literary orientalism of classic origin.

29. B. Berenson, *Essays in the Study of Sienese Painting*, New York, 1918, p. 31, note 1.

30. The date is not definitively established, but since the chapel was erected in 1350 it can be assumed that its decoration was initiated soon after its architectural completion.

31. R. van Marle, *The Development of the Italian Schools of Painting*, The Hague, 1923–1938, III, pp. 425–432.

32. Col. H. Yule in *The Book of Ser Marco Polo . . .*, 3d ed., London and New York, 1923, I, p. 67, and A. C. Moule in the introduction to Marco Polo's *Description of the World*, I, p. 33, note 3. It seems that after Pigafetta's return from Magalhaes' circumnavigation of the earth, in 1521, a mask of this famous companion of the Portuguese navigator replaced the old fashioned Marco Polo in the Venetian carnival. But no contemporary document confirms this unusual testimonial to the Venetian travellers.

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chronicle of Florence prove that Marco Milioni was no less popular there than in his own native town.

More than that, a decisive reason prompted the painter to insert the imaginary portrait of the Polos into his pictorial glorification of the Church and the Dominican Order. The Dominican Francesco Pipino of Bologna, who, about 1315–1320, translated Marco's book into Latin, expressed in the preface of his famous version the opinion "that the perusal of the Book by the Faithful may merit an abounding Grace from the Lord," because of the edifying character of that description of the world. By reading it, the Friar added, "the hearts of some members of the religious orders may be moved to strive for the diffusion of the Christian Faith, and by the Divine Aid to carry the Name of our Lord Jesus Christ, forgotten among so vast multitudes, to those blinded nations, among whom the harvest is indeed so great, and the laborers so few." This is the very idea which inspired and still animates the oriental details of Andrea's teeming and colorful fresco.

IV

Compared with the great variety of works and subjects painted during the Trecento these few bits of true orientalism are of little consequence in the early Italian art of the Renaissance, while in its uninterrupted flowering during the fifteenth century, examples of Asiatic exoticism are even less numerous and important. In a strict sense only one of the Quattrocento artists portrayed an Asiatic type in an unequivocal and realistic image. This figure appears in a group of riders in Pisanello's fresco of St. George in the Church of St. Anastasia at Verona. In spite of his Tuscan name the painter was a Veronese who, about 1440, decorated this beautiful church in his native city. A preparatory sketch of the same exotic man (Fig. 4), delineated with bow and arrow in rustic but elaborate attire, shows Pisanello's particular interest in the strange, stout, grim-looking fellow. The ingenious Veronese artist, who engraved in famous medals the foremost personalities of his time, used the same penetrating style and skill in drawing gruesome, curious, and exotic figures and scenes in the human and animal kingdoms.[33] It is easy to recognize in the broad-faced Mongolian of the Church of St. Anastasia a specimen of the Eastern Asiatic race, as represented by the nomad tribes scattered over the continent.[34] But the bow this Mongol holds in his hand has no particular oriental features and it is the same kind that is carried by a rude, blubber-lipped oriental of decidedly Negroid appearance who stands to the left of Cosimo de' Medici in the train of knights and servants in Benozzo Gozzoli's procession of the Magi (Fig. 6). It is certainly a striking fact that these two exotic types, undoubtedly painted from life, by Italian artists of the Quattrocento are archers serving in a knightly, aristocratic environment. In spite of the independence of the two frescos this affinity is not a mere coincidence.

Considered with a sober mind and a clear idea of their function in their respective pictorial frameworks these two details reveal the true character of the realistic interest felt by the Italian painters of the Quattrocento in Asiatic races and countries. Both figures play subordinate parts in the great compositions in which they appear. They are simple serving men of a rather low degree, comparable to the Saracens and Negroes sometimes represented in similar attitudes in contemporary paintings, drawings, and miniatures or in the rapid sketches of artists who liked to catch the striking varieties of life and nature. Yet where had these artists seen the exotic types they portrayed with a fidelity to nature so scrupulous and candid? None of them had ever crossed the boundaries of his native country. The orientals they depicted were not of the types appearing in Asiatic paintings or drawings which might have served as models or stimulated the skill and fancy of the Italian painters.

It has been suggested that the Quattrocento painters found their oriental prototypes among the suite of the emperor of Byzantium, who in 1438 and 1439 participated in the Council of Ferrara and Florence. But a close examination of the circumstances connected with this great event in the ecclesiastical history of the Renaissance makes its influence on contemporary artistic imagination improbable.

So far as Benozzo Gozzoli's frescos are concerned — their orientalism has been much exaggerated — this influence must be flatly denied. It is difficult to believe that the short stay of the Emperor and his court in Florence in the summer months of 1439 could have had any effect on a pictorial composition created twenty years later by an artist who probably never saw the display of Byzantine pomp which was made in the streets of some Italian cities. In the numerous and reliable descriptions of the Council there is not the slightest hint that the Byzantine Emperor had in his escort dignitaries, servants, or armed men from Mongolia, India, or other Asiatic lands. Vespasiano da Bisticci, who gives a short description of this embassy in his biography of Pope Eugene IV,[35] speaks only of Greeks accompanying the Emperor, and it is only to accommodate his account to an untenable thesis that this term has been interpreted as designating the imaginary Asiatics of the Byzan-

33. Cf. G. H. Hill, *Dessins de Pisanello*, Paris and Brussels, 1929, and A. Venturi, *Pisanello*, Rome, 1939.

34. G. H. Hill, *Pisanello*, London, 1905, p. 87, identified the man as a Kalmuck.

35. "Vita di Eugenio IV," in Vespasiano da Bisticci, *Vite di uomini illustri*, Florence, 1859, especially Chapters 12–14.

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tine court.[36] It is not by such juggleries that an interesting historical problem can be investigated and solved.

The only orientals participating in the Council were the representatives of the Egyptian Coptic Church, the Jacobite sect of Mesopotamia and the Abyssinian Monophysites of Jerusalem.[37] In spite of the fact that they were together regarded as envoys of the legendary Prester John of Ethiopia, none of these representatives of oriental Christianity came directly from that almost inaccessible country. Pope Eugene IV charged the sculptor and architect Antonio Averlino Filarete to perpetuate in a bronze relief his reception of these strange and rare guests.[38] The scene ornaments a door panel of St. Peter's in Rome. But a contemporary document reveals the disappointment of the Florentines in discovering that the subjects of the powerful "Prester John of India" were "men of a very mean appearance."[39] The churches of Russia and Armenia had also sent some high ranking prelates to the Council, but they did not especially impress the general public and were not particularly noticed among the exotic visitors then gathered in Rome, Florence, and Ferrara. Churchmen of the Near East did not constitute an exceptional sight in Quattrocento Italy. Nor were they wont to travel with a suite of armed men. It is significant, indeed, that the contemporary painters did not portray any one of these representatives of oriental Christianity. They confined themselves to drawing the exotic features of low and rude types like Pisanello's and Gozzoli's archers.[40]

No explanation of Asiatic exoticism in the Tuscan art of the Trecento can be gleaned from the pilgrimage of a Nestorian priest like Rabban Sauma, who came to Rome in 1287 from China and then went to France before returning to his native country.[41] Whether this lonely oriental churchman could have stirred the artists of his days and those of the subsequent generation is not an historical problem; it is a question to be answered by common sense. And during the residence of the Papal court in Avignon, from 1309 to 1377, no visitors of this kind were ever seen in Rome.

Likewise nothing substantial can be deduced from the diplomatic and political contacts between Tartar and Western dignitaries which took place, from time to time, in the Near East.[42] These embassies were concerned with an exchange of presents. The oriental envoys usually brought precious garments and textiles like those still preserved in French churches and museums. We know from several authentic reports that the Christian rulers liked to send to the Tartars works of European craftsmanship of a religious or ornamental character.[43] As to commercial connections, the return of the Polo family to Venice in 1295, after an absence of twenty-five years, marks the most important, if not the only event of this kind in more than a century. It impressed Polo's countrymen and contemporaries so deeply that Giovan Battista Ramusio, a Venetian nobleman and scholar of the sixteenth century, was still able to narrate the details, handed down by oral tradition and, accordingly, colored by popular imagination and distorted by legendary misinterpretations.[44] This lasting impression shows how exceptional the event has been considered in Italy for three centuries.

There is no doubt that when Marco Polo came back to his native country, which he had left at the age of seventeen, he looked like an oriental. So did his father and uncle, who had spent most of their lives in the Near and Far East. "They were quite changed in appearance," Ramusio says, "and had taken on a certain indescribable smack of the Tartar both in air and accent." Marco had almost forgotten his native tongue and could not easily make himself understood when he told the wonders of the East to his countrymen. Three years later he had to dictate his "Description of the World" to a professional Italian writer who was more interested in attractive tales of wonder than in objective reports.

As to the merchandise the Polos had carried in a three years' journey by sea and land from Peking to Venice, the same Ramusio tells that their coarse and shabby clothes of a Tartar cut were covered with "jewels of the greatest quantity" and that they lavishly distributed among their servants

36. H. Soulier, *op. cit.*, p. 311. In Filarete's representation of the Emperor's voyages on the bronze door of St. Peter's only Greek churchmen appear, in their characteristic costumes, as members of his suite. For the representation of the episodes of the Council by Filarete cf. M. Lazzaroni and A. Muñoz, *Filarete, scultore e architetto del secolo XV*, Rome, 1908, pp. 70–82.

37. Cf. E. Cerulli, "Eugenio IV e gli Etiopi al Concilio di Firenze," *Rendiconti della R. Accademia dei Lincei, Classe di scienze morali . . .*, Ser. VI, IX, 1933, pp. 347 ff. This is the only reliable contribution to our knowledge of the oriental participation at the Council, based on the original documents preserved in a special silver case at the Biblioteca Laurenziana in Florence.

38. Lazzaroni-Muñoz, *op. cit.*, figs. 64 and 65.

39. Cerulli, *op. cit.*, p. 349. The Abyssinian representatives entered Florence on September 26, 1441, and arrived in Rome a fortnight later.

40. There is no evidence that the artists were especially impressed by the envoy of the "Sultan of Babylon," i.e., the Mameluke King of Egypt. The envoy, in 1487, brought a lion and a giraffe and stayed in Florence for nine months. Elephants were brought to Italy by orientals at different epochs. Short information and bibliography may be found in L. Geiger's appendix to J. Burckhardt, *Die Kultur der Renaissance in Italien*, Leipzig, 1919, II, Sections LXXXIX and XCI.

41. A. C. Moule, *Christians in China before 1550*, London, 1930, pp. 94–127.

42. Best report of these diplomatic relations in G. Soranzo, *Il Papato, l'Europa cristiana e i Tartari*, Milan, 1930.

43. *Ibid.*

44. Col. H. Yule, *The Book of Ser Marco Polo*, I, pp. 4 ff.

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the material of their oriental robes of crimson satin, damask, and velvet, "reaching to the ground such as people in those days wore within doors." But the family's testaments and legal documents do not confirm these details or the rumor of the travellers' fabulous wealth.[45] They seem to have been deprived at Trebisond of many of the valuables which they had carried safely to the borders of the Western world. Since they set out on their first trip into Asia, in 1262, the Polos' main trade had been in jewels, and they probably brought to Venice some of the precious stones in which they had invested the riches accumulated during a stay of seventeen years in Kubilai's China and during their journey home through Hormuz and Tabriz, the principal pearl markets of the time.

Beside these jewels, textiles and some flour of sago collected in the East Indies, we know of only a few *chinoiseries* imported into Venice by our travellers.[46] The robes of "satin," mentioned by Ramusio, might have come directly from China and the seaport of Zaitun in the Fu-Kian province. But exceptional events like the Polos' return were not needed in order to bring Chinese textiles to Italy. Because of its low initial price and because of the inflation of Tartar paper-currency, such textiles were the only commodity which the Florentine commercial agent Francesco Balducci Pegolotti reported, about 1340, as regular articles of export from Cathay.[47] These silks were highly appreciated in Italy and elsewhere in Europe. One of these rare Chinese garments has been found in the coffin of Can Grande della Scala, Lord of Verona, who died in 1329, who was so inspired by his vision of the magnificence of Asia that he could bear the title of the Mongolian rulers — Can Grande — without being ridiculed by friends and subjects.[48] The ideal image of the Grand Khan hovered before the mind of this little Italian prince as an embodiment of imperial might and utopian grandeur. The Chinese fashion in shrouds had already helped to keep alive this lofty illusion, which Dante seems to have shared when he was a guest at the court of Verona in 1304. In that very year Pope Benedict XI was buried in Perugia wrapped in a Chinese garment.

For a long time oriental clothes were an attribute of sovereign rank and dignity. Frederick II of Hohenstaufen attired himself like an emir and the imperial dalmatic of his successors in Germany was of authentic Chinese make.[49] Rudolf of Habsburg, who died in Milan in 1356, was buried in his robe of state of Persian provenance, the garment still bearing its original ornamental inscription.[50] In conformity with this tradition Cosimo and Lorenzo de' Medici appear in Benozzo Gozzoli's fresco in oriental clothing covered thick with gold and scrolls. This gorgeous attire, borrowed from the pictorial representations of the three Magi, manifested the self-bestowed rights and dignity of the Medici house as a ruling dynasty with autocratic power.

Since the early Middle Ages the idea of power and domination seems to have been somehow connected with the legendary vision of oriental wealth and luster as represented by Alexander the Great, Prester John, and finally the Grand Khan. It was for this reason that Asiatic textiles, patterns, and models came into fashion in the late Middle Ages. The increasing wealth and ambition of the patricians produced in the upper and middle classes a demand for silken and golden materials of this royal style. The so-called "drappi tartareschi" referred to by Dante (*Inf.* XVII, 17) became more and more fashionable and popular, although their cost was enormous.[51] In spite of Pegolotti's statements, direct trade with the countries of the Far East was not very active. We know of only two Italian merchants who were residents of China at that epoch: Andalò of Savignone and Petrus de Lucalongo. The latter accompanied Friar Johannes of Monte Corvino to China and bought the plot where the first Catholic Church in the capital of the Khan was erected in 1305.[52] After the Polos there is no record of Italian traders returning from China until Niccolò de' Conti, coming from the Far East by the sea route, landed in Italy in 1439.[53] During this long period commercial exchange was almost exclusively in the hands of commission agents and oriental middlemen residing in the ports of the Crimea and the Caspian Sea and scattered cities in Asia Minor and Syria. Only a few wealthy men were able to secure genuine oriental silks. With the increasing demand during the fourteenth century the silk weaver's trade was established in Venice,

45. *Ibid.*, pp. 70 ff., and A. C. Moule and P. Pelliot, Marco Polo's *Description of the World*, I, pp. 28 ff.

46. Yule, *op. cit.*, Introduction, I, pp. 78–80.

47. *La pratica della mercatura*, ed. A. Evans, Cambridge, Mass., 1937, p. 23.

48. Cf. G. Sangiorgi, "Le stoffe e le vesti tombali di Cangrande della Scala," *Bollettino d'arte*, I, 1922, pp. 443–457.

49. The best description of the Emperor's orientalism is by E. Kantorowicz, *Frederick the Second, 1194–1250*, English ed. by E. O. Lorimer, London, 1931, and the bibliographical *Ergänzungsband* of the original German edition, Berlin, 1931. For the dalmatic of the German Emperors cf. O. von Falke, *Kunstgeschichte der Seidenweberei*, p. 31.

50. Cf. H. Demel, "Das Leichengewand Herzog Rudolfs von Oesterreich," *Kirchenkunst*, V, 1933, pp. 33 ff.

51. Cf. Paget Toynbee, "Tartar Cloths," *Romania*, XXIX, 1900, pp. 558 ff.

52. *Sinica Franciscana*, I, pp. 352 ff., and A. C. Moule, *Christians in China*, London, 1930, p. 179.

53. Niccolò de' Conti was the only traveller after Marco Polo who, in 1439, brought back to Italy direct information about India, the Sunda Islands and Indo-China. He spent twenty-five years in the East where he was forced to embrace the Mohammedan faith. Cf. M. Longhena, *Viaggi in Persia, India e Giava di Niccolò de' Conti*, Milan, 1929.

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Florence, and Lucca, and produced, in the numerous workshops of the "arte della seta," imitations of oriental patterns as well as original inventions of the craftsman's fancy. As a matter of fact, the latter were soon preferred and were developed in a style and technique more congenial to Italian taste and tradition.[54]

This is the reason why there is so little trace of oriental crafts in Italian life and art of the early Renaissance. Most of the Asiatic exoticism is of Italian origin, both technically and stylistically. Interest in the fabulous countries at the end of the world was, of course, always lively, but the fantastic picture of the lands of gold and silver, of pearls and precious stones, of spices and marvels grew more and more popular as the East became less accessible to ordinary commerce and exploration. The realistic reports of the missionaries were almost forgotten in the fifteenth century, and Mandeville's forgery had already supplanted Marco Polo's more reliable "Description of the World." This evolution of the popular and literary image of the East was aided by the mystery which surrounded the origin of the riches whose mirage inspired the enterprises of Columbus and Vasco da Gama in search of the fabulous regions of India and the lands of the Grand Khan. But in the creative realism of contemporary Italian art exoticism does not go beyond a few conventional decorative accessories or modish details "alla turchesca" or "alla moresca." There is no trace of imitation of the authentic East Asiatic, no trace of East Asiatic influence which would justify a systematic comparison of artistic trends and monuments in the two independent spheres of taste and inspiration.

V

These critical conclusions isolate the few but impressive cases in which a real representation of Asiatic types in the Italian art of the Renaissance appears to exist beyond doubt. The Asiatic costumes of these people do not create a problem. Exotic dress was known and appreciated everywhere in Europe and constituted an article of trade. The essential question is how to explain the Mongolian heads of the men in Lorenzetti's fresco or Pisanello's and Gozzoli's Asiatic archers. The scholars who constructed complicated systems of far-fetched hypotheses for the solution of this riddle overlooked a very obvious and simple fact. During the Renaissance, Italy, and especially Florence, had a considerable Asiatic population of recent immigration and settlement. The historians of Italian orientalism in art and life have overlooked the slave markets of Venice, Genoa, Florence, Naples, and most of the large and small towns in Italy, which harbored a particularly busy section of the Asiatic slave trade in Europe. A multitude of documents, still preserved in Italian archives, many of them carefully edited in easily accessible publications, reveal that during the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries Mongolian slaves were preferred, in Florence and elsewhere, for indoor work and every kind of hard or degrading labor.[55] The very incomplete *Registro degli schiavi*, kept by the Florentine State between 1366 and 1397, mentions two hundred and fifty-nine Tartars, mostly women, as well as three Circassians, seven Russians, one Arab, and one Saracen sold by the officially recognized local slave dealers of that city. The proportion was the same in other places of Northern Italy and of Tuscany, where even minor centers like Pistoia, Prato, and Siena had a more or less appreciable quota of Asiatic slave labor.[56]

It is important to note in those documents and in the files and letters of subsequent centuries that careful racial differentiation was always made by the dealers as well as by purchasers and officials, who did not fail to register individual peculiarities of age, stature, complexion, origin, provenance, name, and state of health. These short descriptions are correct and reliable. They ordinarily mention the yellowish complexion characteristic of the Mongolian race, the small pug-noses and blinking slit-eyes, and they specify defects acquired by disease and accidents or disfiguring marks on faces, hands, and bodies.[57] This careful distinction of racial origin was occasioned by the legislation introduced in Siena as early as 1356, and by the Florentine State in 1369. In accordance with ecclesiastical authority these laws sanctioned the slave trade in unbaptized persons and were in consequence favorable to the influx of pagan people from Asia into the most civilized centers of the Western world.[58] The Asiatic element was the most numerous be-

54. Cf. von Falke, *op. cit.*, especially pp. 29–32 and 39–42.

55. The most recent book on the subject is by R. Livi, *La schiavitù domestica nei tempi di mezzo . . .*, Padua, 1928. For Florence cf. A. Zanelli, *Le schiave orientali in Firenze nei sec. XIV e XV*, Florence, 1885, and R. Davidsohn's *Geschichte von Florenz*, IV, Berlin, 1925, pp. 251–252. In writing to her son Filippo, on September 13, 1465, the Florentine lady, Alessandra Macinghi Strozzi, advised him to prefer a Tartar slave as the most fit for housework. (Cf. C. Guasti, *Alessandra Macinghi Strozzi. Lettere di una gentildonna fiorentina del sec. XV . . .*, Florence, 1877, pp. 474–475.) Marco Polo praised Tartar women as "notable housewives" (Col. H. Yule, *op. cit.*, I, p. 252). Speaking of the Crimean slave markets, the fifteenth century Spanish traveller, Pero Tafur (*Travels and Adventures*, translated and edited by M. Letts, New York and London, 1926, p. 113) affirms that "if there is a Tartar man or woman among them the price is a third more, since it may be taken as certain that no Tartar ever betrayed a master."

56. The slave legislation of Siena, introduced in 1356 and evidently based on a long and complex experience with oriental slaves, was the first of its kind in Tuscany. Cf. E. Grottanelli de' Santi, "Provvigioni senesi riguardanti schiavi e schiave nei sec. XIV e XV," *Miscellanea storica senese*, II, 1893, pp. 102–106 and 120–124. For Venice cf. the article of V. Lazari in *Miscellanea di storia italiana*, II, 1863, pp. 463–497, who unfortunately failed to publish the numerous documents concerning the Venetian slave trade throughout the Middle Ages.

57. Cf. the documents and letters published by R. Livi, *op. cit.*

58. St. Antoninus, at that time bishop of Florence, stated in his

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cause there was no organized export of Mohammedan slave labor from North Africa. Saracens were not very much appreciated or trusted, while Tartars were praised for their physical endurance and good nature. These unfortunate creatures accordingly were shipped by the thousands from Western and Central Asia, and even from the Chinese and Tibetan borderlands,[59] to the ports of the Black Sea, whence they were transferred to the seaports of Venice, Ancona, and Genoa for distribution in the rest of the country.

This branch of Italian trade with the East must have started shortly after the Italian republics abolished, in the thirteenth century, the traditional indigenous serfdom.[60] In 1328 the Venetian Grand Council granted the rights of citizenship to Marco Polo's slave, Peter the Tartar, "as having been a long time in Venice, and well-conducted." The import of slaves from Asia increased rapidly after Italy's depopulation in consequence of the disastrous plague of 1348; it ended almost completely after the fall of Constantinople in 1453. By this trade the Mongolian type became very familiar in Northern Italy and especially in Florence, where the most conspicuous families, such as the Adimari, Alberti, Cavalcanti, Medici, Strozzi, Vespucci, and many others had their servants "de genere Tartarorum,"[61] and were emulated by notaries, priests, physicians, merchants, and finally craftsmen and artists. Simone di Giovanni, the pretended brother of Donatello and collaborator of Filarete in making the bronze doors of St. Peter's, had a Tartar and a Russian slave in his Florentine home.[62] An ancestor of Alesso Baldovinetti bought three of those exotic girls whose portraits he drew on the margin of his still unpublished journal.[63]

Most of the accurate official descriptions of these creatures are anything but flattering. Expressions like "pulcra corpore" or "pelle alba" are rare. Yet the Mongolian slave girls seem to have been attractive enough to the Florentine male folk to become a disruptive element in the family life and general morality of the town.[64] It is symptomatic that a lady of the rank of Alessandra Macinghi Strozzi wrote jocosely, in 1464, about a girl slave flirting with her son and behaving like the lady of his household.[65] There is evidence enough for the important part played by these women in the amorous life of the town. Figures speak an impressive language. Among the 7,534 infants delivered, between 1394 and 1485, in the Florentine foundling hospital, up to 32 per cent were illegitimate children of those oriental slaves.[66] When recognized, these halfbreeds followed the condition of the father and were declared free by law.[67]

In this way a large influx of Asiatic blood penetrated into the Tuscan population during the most brilliant epoch of its cultural and economic evolution. Other Italian towns with a high standard of life and wealth, and even smaller places all over the country, had a similar exotic population within their walls. But the poor wretches tossed up on the Italian shores by Venetian and Genoese dealers and intermediary agents had nothing to tell about their native countries. These boys and girls were captured and sold at a tender age, and when they reached their destinations most of them were not yet in their teens.[68] They came to the market "almost naked," as the crude language of the documents monotonously repeats, and their Tartar or Turkish names, the sole legacy brought from distant lands, they gave up at the baptismal font as soon as they became the property of their first purchaser. As they came by the thousand and were rapidly absorbed by the indigenous population, a certain Mongolian strain could not have been rare in Tuscan homes and streets.[69] But its influence on artistic types and artistic inspiration has been insignificant. A painter from Siena, Paolo di Giovanni Fei, who worked in the second half of the fourteenth century, liked to give his feminine faces a Mongolian cast by painting their cheek bones higher than usual.[70] Some other characteristic traits of the Asiatic type may have attracted the interest of the Italian painters of the Quattrocento but there is no evidence of their con-

Summa Theologica (Florence, 1582, III, pp. 60 ff.) that baptism of slaves does not imply their liberation. Cf. A. Zanelli, *op. cit.*

59. Lazari, *op. cit.*, p. 470. The reason why the slaves came from the interior of the Asiatic continent may be sought in the fact that the populations of the Euro-Asiatic borderlands were Christians or Mohammedans who were not generally accepted in the mediaeval slave trade.

60. Zanelli, *op. cit.*, pp. 10 ff. This was the Italian branch of an extensive Asiatic slave trade whose main currents were directed from the ports of Crimea to Constantinople and Egypt. The Tartar element decreased after the fall of the Mongolian empire and was replaced by people from the Balkans and Russia.

61. In 1459, Giovan Francesco Strozzi had in his household more than fifty attendants and slaves. Cf. Zanelli, *op. cit.*, p. 84.

62. Cf. E. Müntz, "Les arts à la cour des Papes . . .," *Mélanges d'archéologie et d'histoire publiés par l'École Française de Rome*, 1884, p. 19.

63. G. Biagi, *Men and Manners of Old Florence*, Chicago, 1909, p. 100.

64. The documents of the Florentine foundling house of the Quattrocento reveal many somber domestic tragedies and some motifs for farces too. Slaves play an important part in Italian novels and comedies of the Renaissance.

65. Guasti, *op. cit.* Letter of July 4, 1464.

66. Cf. Livi, *op. cit.*, pp. 114 ff. Many of the girl slaves described in the *Registro degli schiavi*, mostly in their teens, were sold in a state of pregnancy and later used as nurses.

67. The mother had to remain a slave and was separated from child and home. Cf. Zanelli, *op. cit.*, p. 89.

68. By strictly enforced laws it was everywhere prohibited to employ slaves in workshops of any kind. A direct participation of these orientals in contemporary Italian craftsmanship is excluded by the legislation of the state and the charters of the corporations.

69. Italian anthropologists affirm that it is still recognizable, especially in the low strata of the population. Cf. the statistical surveys published by Livi, *op. cit.*, passim.

70. Cf. Edgell, *Sienese Painting*, p. 175.

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taminating the pure and ideal types of their feminine figures by touches of oriental exoticism.

As to the few rude and authentic oriental types painted by Ambrogio Lorenzetti, Pisanello, and Benozzo Gozzoli, there can be no doubt that they reproduce those male slaves from Western or Central Asia who served as menials, hunters, or soldiers in the household of Italian princes, magnates, and patricians. From Marco Polo's time the Tartars were famous for their excellence in archery.[71] They were particularly in demand among the upward striving families of the new Florentine aristocracy. But they were also a common sight in the Italian commercial centers of the fourteenth century. Those poor fellows never inspired the visions of distant lands of gold, pearls, and precious stones, of the marvels and wonders evoked by mediaeval fiction or travel literature. With the multitude of their companions in servitude and misfortune, and with their more or less legal progeny, they represented the Asiatic element in the cosmopolitan population of Renaissance Italy.

Whenever an exotic type appears with realistic traits and characteristic attitudes in contemporary Italian paintings and drawings, sketches, or woodcuts, its living model can be supposed to have existed as a slave in the artist's closest environment. For the rest, Italian art of the Renaissance avoided every oriental influence, either compositional, structural, or stylistic, developing as a national expression of feeling and imagination within the European tradition. In this new style exoticism is merely an accessorial exception without any deeper significance or special artistic interest. Even in decorative details and ornamental patterns the oriental influence fades before the impetus of free and genuine creation. The new style of Giotto and Duccio arose from a new artistic consciousness which determined all essential expressions of creative imagination and even the rendering of accessories.

It belongs to the paradoxes of history that the early and traditional oriental exoticism in Italian art vanished just at the end of the thirteenth century when direct communication with Central Asia and the Far East was being inaugurated by missionaries and tradesmen. These political events and their economic consequences did not affect the spiritual life and the indigenous trends of contemporary civilization. The orientalism so prominent in all fields of artistic activity during the Middle Ages was first overshadowed by the inspiration of French Gothic and finally supplanted, together with all patterns of the *maniera greca*, by the original visions of ingenious artists and a national style of art. What was left of Asiatic exoticism is nothing more than a minor aspect of the inspired and lively realism characteristic of the Italian painting of the Renaissance.

71. Cf. Yule, *The Book of Ser Marco Polo*, II, p. 460.

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